

REMARKS

An Office Action was mailed on October 22, 2003 and declared final. Claims 1, 2 and 4-6 are pending.

Claims 1, 2, 5 and 6 are now rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Katsura et al. (JP 11-130222) in view of Lewis (U.S. Patent 4,744,843), while claim 4 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Katsura et al. '222 in view of Stijntjes et al. (U.S. Patent 4,839,220).

Responsive thereto, Applicant has amended the claims to define over the cited art of record. Specifically, claim 1 has been amended and claim 7 has been added to incorporate the teaching found on page 5, lines 8-9 and 22-26 of the specification. The amendment to claim 6 is supported on page 4, lines 21-24 of the specification. In view of such amendments, Applicant respectfully submits that one skilled in the art would not consider the claimed invention to be obvious in view of the combination of the cited references.

The Examiner asserts that it would have been obvious to dimensionally stabilize the structure of Katsura by curing (vulcanizing) as suggested by Lewis motivated by the desire to enhance the bonding between the elastomer and woven layers. Applicant respectfully disagrees. In the present invention, the first and second rubber layers **220A**, **220B** are cured or vulcanized, which is other than, i.e. distinct from, the stabilizing treatment at a temperature in the region of 160°C. In other words, the rubber layers **220A**, **220B** are already cured, or -- previously cured -- as set forth in the claims, when the first layer of cloth **220M** is interposed and subsequently the second layer of cloth **220N** is added underneath the rubber layer **220B**. If the present invention was not subject to the stabilizing treatment as set forth in accordance with the claims, so that the

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molded rubber sheet is used for the slab production as it is after the first layer of cloth 220M is interposed between the rubber layers 220A, 220B and the second layer of cloth 220N is added underneath the rubber layer 220B, it would be impossible to make the intended use of the claimed molded rubber sheet, which must adhere to several requirements as set forth on page 3, lines 10-20 of the specification.

Accordingly, the teaching of Lewis '843 of preparing an uncured belt precursor comprising uncured rubber and layers of reinforcing members -- step (a) of claim 1 of Lewis -- and of subsequently curing the rubber layers -- step (e) of claim of Lewis -- cannot be combined with the structure of Katsura to obtain the present invention. It must be appreciated that a clear distinction is being made in the claims of the present invention between pre-curing of the rubber sheets and stabilization treatment of the composite article, which steps are not be interchanged or understood by the Examiner to be analogous or equivalents. As Lewis '843 clearly teaches and actually claims away from the method of the present invention as noted above, one skilled in the art would not consider it obvious to incorporate the teachings of Lewis '843 into Katsura to render the claimed invention obvious.

In addition, all of the cited references clearly fail to teach or reasonably suggest a structure currently defined by claim 6.

The Examiner is further respectfully directed to the technical requirements of the molded rubber sheet of the invention, which is expressly to be utilized for the manufacture of slabs of the type mentioned in the beginning of the present specification. The production of the slab requires in particular handling the mixture under vacuum and at high temperature while it is contained in the molded rubber sheet of the present invention. As a consequence, a belt as disclosed by Lewis

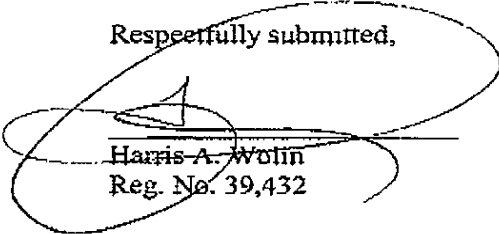
*843 is not suitable for performing the task of the present invention, which provides further support against an obviousness rejection.

For the foregoing reasons, reconsideration is respectfully requested.

An earnest effort has been made to be fully responsive to the Examiner's objections. In view of the above amendments and remarks, it is believed that claims 1, 2 and 4-7, consisting of independent claim 1 and the claims dependent therefrom, are in condition for allowance. Passage of this case to allowance is earnestly solicited. However, if for any reason the Examiner should consider this application not to be in condition for allowance, the Examiner is respectfully requested to telephone the undersigned attorney at the number listed below prior to issuing a further Action.

Any fee due with this paper may be charged on Deposit Account 50-1290.

Respectfully submitted,



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